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Shopping

Monday, November 04, 2002

Headline News

Farmers try selling goats for meat

Harry Young and his son, Greg, bought their first Boer goats last September in an effort to make a little extra money.

Young and his son raise beef cows, tobacco and hay and thought raising and selling Boer goats, which are profitable in the U.S. because of the various ethnic groups that eat goat meat, would help make up for the financial loss they've experienced with their tobacco crops.

"I'm just trying to diversify," Young said. "The goats will hopefully help subsidize the income a little bit... Nothing is going to replace tobacco but there might be some things to help subsidize the loss."

Last week, Young, along with goat producers from Spencer, Nelson, Washington, Hardin, Casey, Green, Boyle, Adair and Taylor Counties, took several of his goats to the very first Central Kentucky Meat Goat Association goat collection at the Marion County fair grounds.

He expects to get \$50 to \$60 for each goat but isn't sure if the new endeavor is going to pay off.

"It's still too early to tell," Young said. "The problem we're having right now is that there aren't a lot of experienced people in Kentucky who know a lot about goats. So, there are going to be some mistakes made. We're on a learning curve right now."

Young is still unsure of how many goats he needs to have in order for him to see any sort of significant profit. This time next year he hopes he will know if raising goats is worthwhile or not.

"A lot of people have goats for a hobby," Young said. "We've got goats to try to make money."

Joyce Cardenas, Central Kentucky Meat Goat Association secretary, raises over 100 Boer goats and said there is a definite need for goat meat.

"It's a big market," Cardenas said. "Right now, the majority of the goats are being shipped to Pennsylvania because of the ethnic groups who mainly eat this type of meat... Goat is widely eaten across the globe."

Muslims, Mexicans, Greeks and Hindus are among the ethnic groups who regularly eat goat meat, especially on religious holidays.

For instance, Hindus celebrate Navadurgara Oct. 17-26 and Hindu families buy a goat for a family feast. A family will buy a male goat because female goats are not acceptable.

The size of the goat depends on the size of the family. So, usually, goat producers sell their goats when they are 40 to 45 pounds to meet the demand, Cardenas said.

Holidays such as this one are "ideal market times" for goat producers.

"You're supposed to have your goats ready for these times,"

Cardenas said. "The prices will go up for these holidays."

Goat meat tastes very similar to lamb and is lower in cholesterol than chicken, Cardenas said.

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Originally, Boer goats came from Africa. Texas, because of its warm weather, is the number one goat producer in the U.S. Since most of the goats are shipped to Pennsylvania, it is easier for buyers to come to Kentucky and collect their goats rather than drive to Texas.

"We can market better from this area," Cardenas said.

Before Boer goats were introduced in the U.S., 80 percent of the goat meat was being imported from other countries. Now farmers all over the U.S. are "capitalizing on the market."

"There's no sense in importing the meat when we can raise it and make the money ourselves," Cardenas said. "We have a lot of land in this area good for goats."

Raising goats is "hard work" because the goats must be wormed and vaccinated often and their hooves must be trimmed regularly, Cardenas said.

Marion County Extension Agent Ed Lanham is the advisor for the Central Kentucky Meat Goat Association and said he doesn't believe raising goats is necessarily "hard work" but they do need a great deal of attention.

"Anybody who neglects their goats will have some problems," Lanham said. "For those people who are good managers and do the right things, they will do okay."

Lanham and several volunteers were at the fairgrounds last week organizing the goat collection. Lanham stayed up all night Tuesday night and said 228 goats were collected. The collection went well and out of those 228 goats, 170 of them went to a buyer in western Kentucky, he said.

The "top goats" went for 85 cents a pound, which is "okay" but Lanham hopes the price will improve in the future.

"It's not the top price or the bottom price, it's in between," he said.

"Prices are going up with the holidays coming up. We would like prices to be a little better but we can live with that right now until we get more goats. If we had 500 goats we would have more selling power."

Lanham, who raises goats himself, said the goat market is "very promising," especially with the changing population.

"With growing ethnic groups like Asians and Hispanics, more and more goat meat is going to be consumed," he said. "We are hoping Kentucky will become a leading producer for goat. The demand is there it's just a matter of marketing and marketing is very difficult."

Marketing is the toughest aspect of farming, Lanham said.

"If you don't get the price you want for it, what have you accomplished?" he said. "Marketing is our toughest obstacle right now."

